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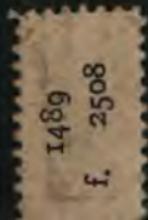
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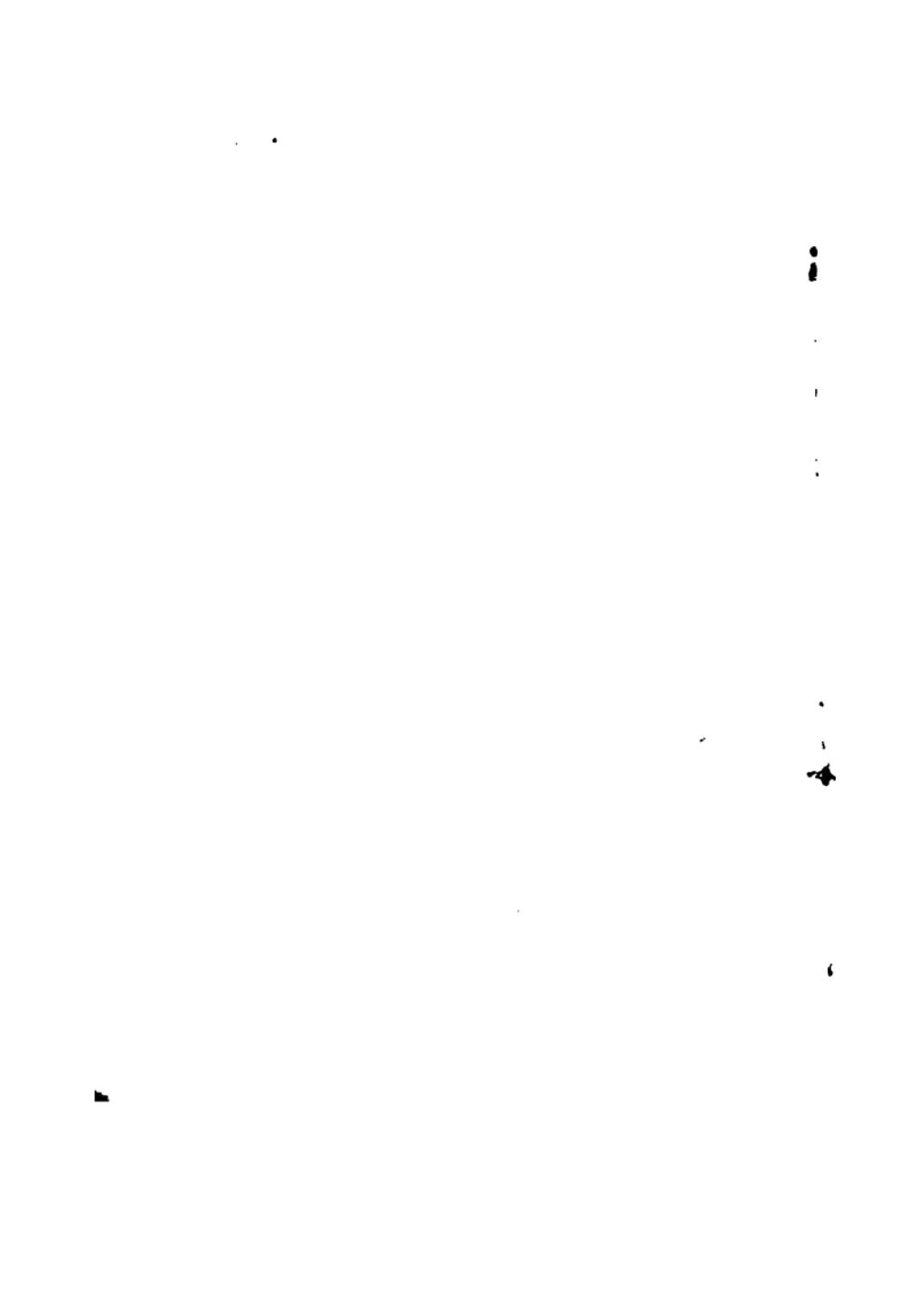


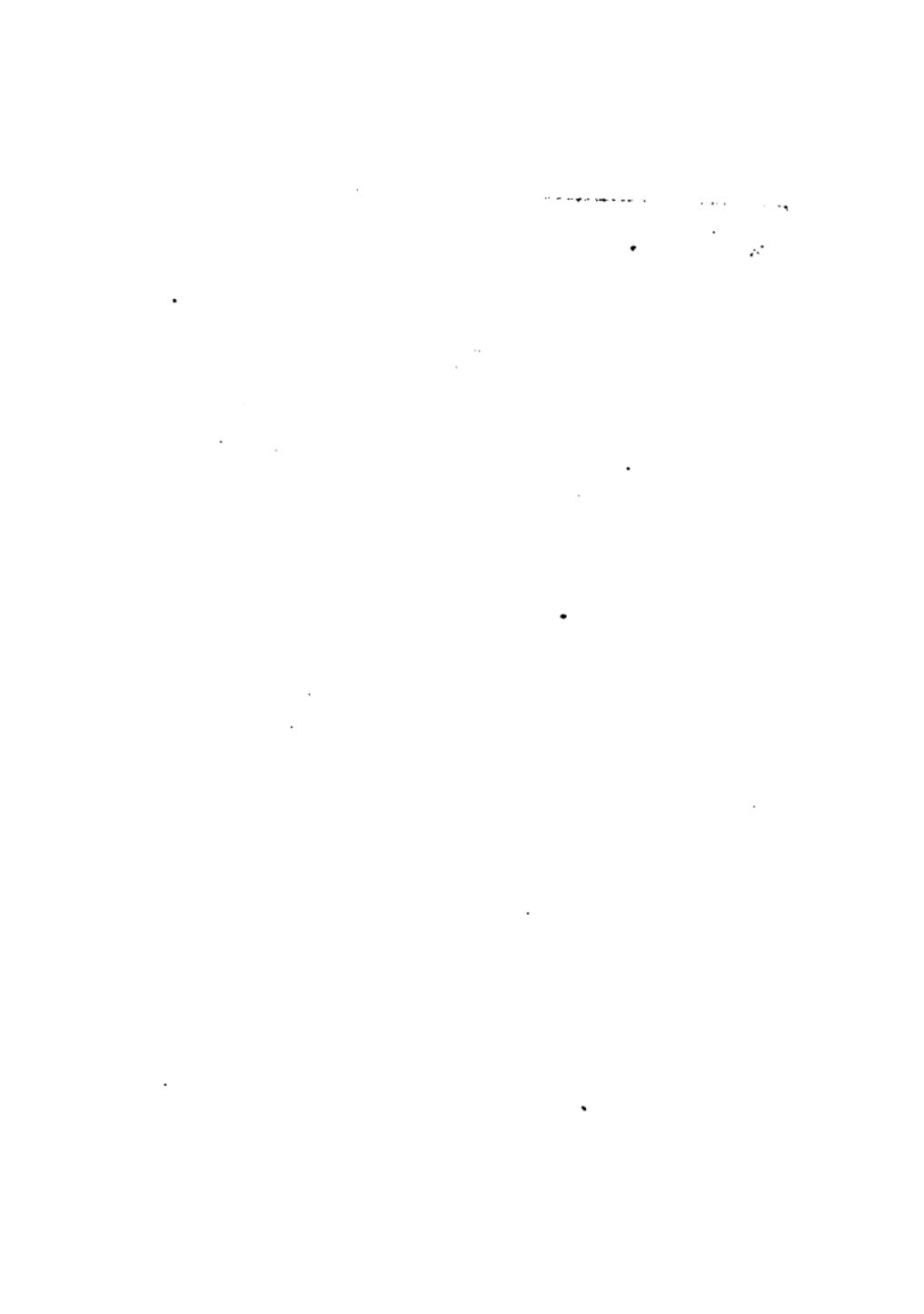


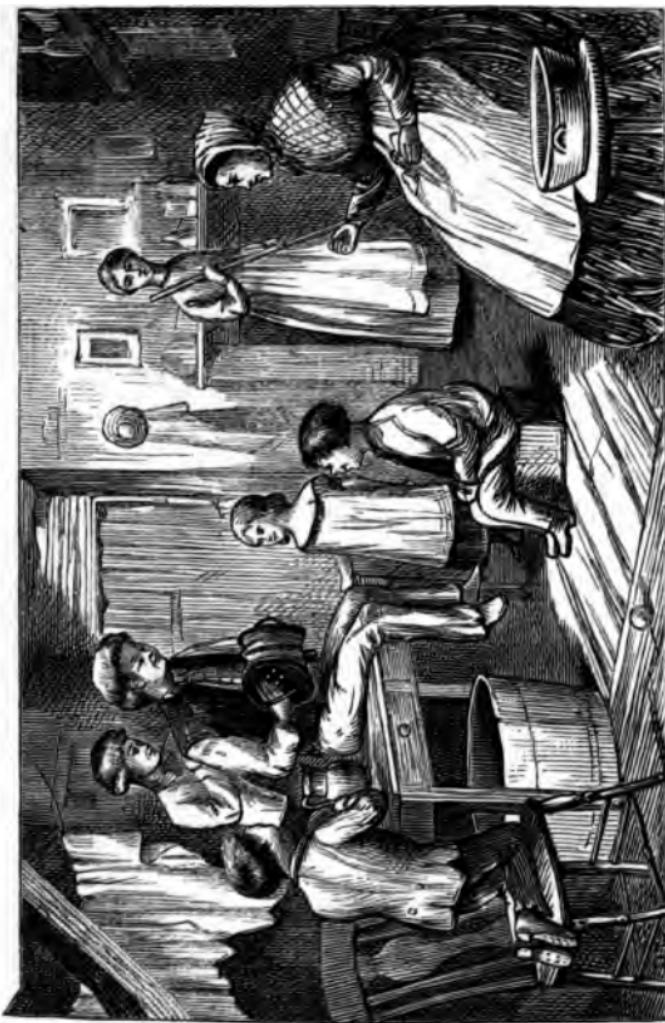
MARY PASCOE ;

OB,

WHAT GOOD CAN I DO ?







The broken "Box of Music."—See page 10.

MARY PASCOE;

OR,

What Good can I do?

By the Author of

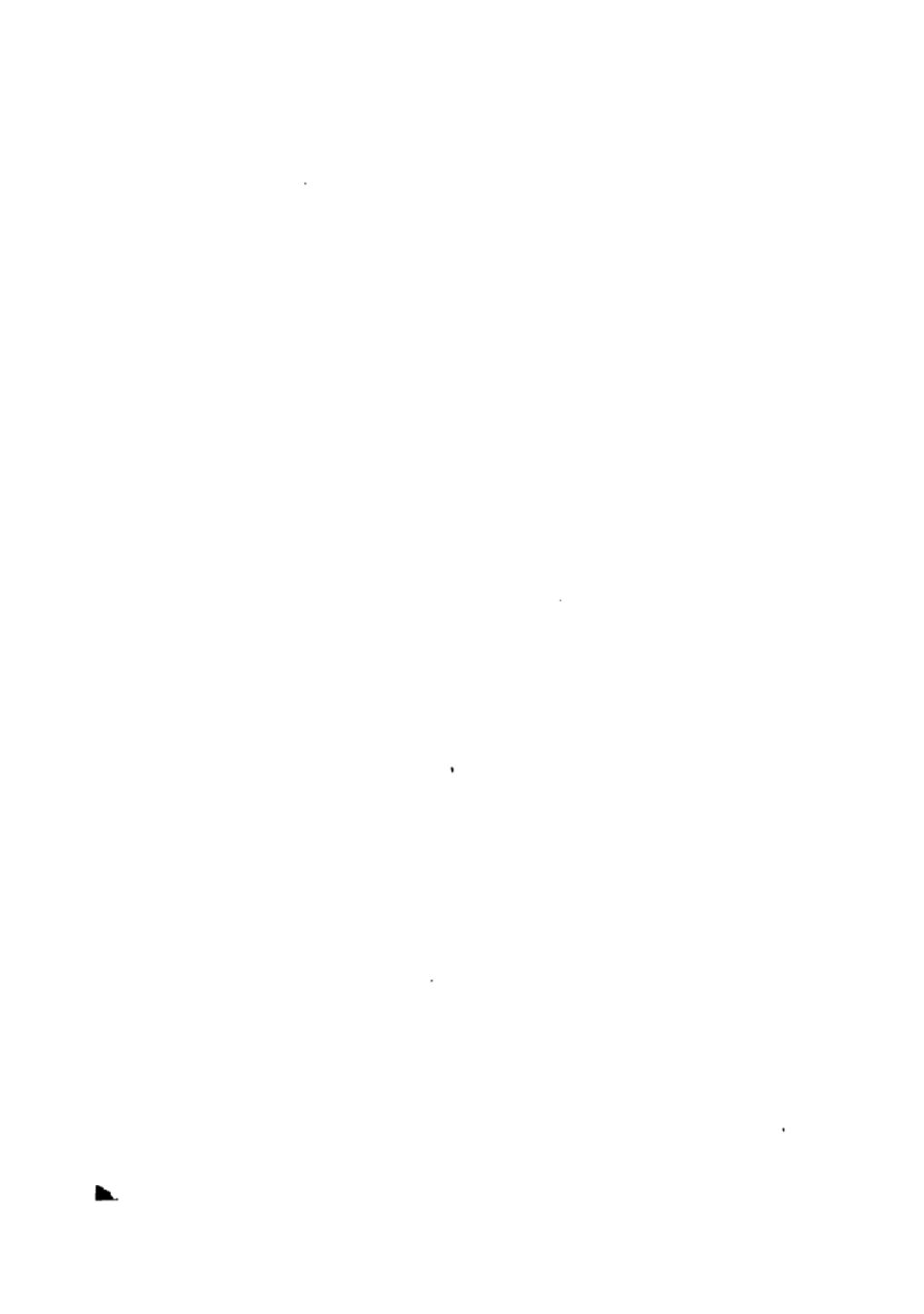
"GEORGE WALLIS," "TRECAN FARM," &c., &c.

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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.—The Pascoe Family	7
„ II.—Death	24
„ III.—The Young Housekeeper	39
„ IV.—Mary's after Life	52



Mary Pascoe ;

OR,

WHAT GOOD CAN I DO ?

CHAPTER I.

THE PASCOE FAMILY.

“ GET out, you good for nothing little rascal ; stop that noise, can’t ye, or I’ll make ye to ; how dare you go on like that there after I’ve spoken to you ? but ‘tis as well to speak to the post. You make that noise again, and you’ll catch it, I know ! Here, Mary, reach

me down the stick, like a good girl. Now do it again, and you dare!"

It was thus Betsy Pascoe spoke to her little boy. The words were half screamed at him, and they were not motherly words. But George, the boy to whom they were spoken, was accustomed to such threats, and he took no notice, except to stop for a time the noise he had been making. He was seated on the table with an old broken concertina in his hands. His eyes were sparkling with delight and fun. The "box of music" was a grander plaything than he had had for a long time. Two more rough-headed little fellows were hanging over his shoulder, and a fourth sat in front watching the musical operations with great glee. The threat of a stick stopped for a time the din which the broken instrument and the boys'

laughter had been making, and George set to work to find out "what he was like inside."

A hammer was produced, and the worn-out concertina soon fell to pieces under a few blows. A blank look of disappointment came over the little ones when they found there was nothing to interest them inside.

"Music's all gone now," said little Jim ; "Mother, George has been and killed the music."

"Nonsense, Jim, hold your row," said George, "I'll set him to rights again in a minute ; there's music in him yet," and to prove the truth of this, he drew out the remains of the instrument, which of course made a worse noise than ever.

"At it again, are you ?" said the mother. "Oh dear, dear, what a bother you are ! Mary, where did I put the stick ?" And

the poor woman pretended that she could not find it. George looked up for a moment, but he soon found that it was only a threat, as usual, so he went on triumphantly with his work. Jim sat opposite, still watching George trying to "patch the music up." But Dick and Tom found it dull work; so they rolled off the table and rushed out of the house, bent on the first piece of mischief that should turn up.

It was not long before they came back. Dick held in his hand a gosling. He had it by the neck, and was enjoying the kicking and quacking which the poor little thing made in its struggles to get free. He put the gosling down presently in the middle of the cottage, and joined a troop of little ones who came in with Tom. Tom had in his arms a kid about a fortnight old, which was

also put down on the kitchen floor. There it began to play with the boys, and dance and jump about as only kids can, while the boys screamed with laughter and enjoyment.

All this time Betsy was looking on with a weary, half-amused, half-worried expression on her face. She was a worn, haggard, sickly-looking woman. The children about her were not under her control. She had mismanaged them from the first. She would threaten them, and seldom carry out her threats; or she would say, "Father's coming," when she knew he was far away at his work. Or she would declare that she would tell father when he came home—a thing she never did, for fear of her husband's violence. In this way she lost all influence, and, as she said sometimes to her neighbours, her "children did a'most worrit her to

death." But it was not only that Betsy's children were noisy, unruly, and disobedient. She often had hard work to feed them; for her husband was a drinking man, and only a small portion of his wages came to Betsy to provide for the family.

Bill Pascoe, the father, had eighteen shillings a-week, more than enough, well managed, to keep even his large family in tolerable comfort. Half the eighteen, however, he generally spent in the public house. When Bill was spoken to about this, he would say, "What else can a man do? How can I go home to all that discomfort and misery, when there's a nice fire and pleasant company at 'The Cock and Bottle'? And I work hard enough for it, too, nobody can deny that."

Now, if Bill Pascoe had brought his wages

to his wife, as he ought to have done, it might have enabled poor Betsy to keep the house tidy and comfortable. And if Betsy had been a better manager she might, perhaps, have done something towards keeping her husband from the public house. Both were to blame. Poor Betsy, when she first married, was a decent body enough; and Bill was very proud of her when he brought her home as his bride. But ill-health, and a large family, a drunken husband, and constant worry, had sadly altered Betsy. She gave in to troubles, instead of trying to overcome them. She never went to God for help. She had gone to Church regularly at one time, because she thought it respectable to do so. But after a while she made her children an excuse; and now she never went, except it was to be "Churched" after the birth of another child.

Betsy was looking on, as I have said, with a half-amused, half-worried expression, while her children played with the kid, and ran after the gosling. She was nursing baby in the chimney corner. It was no use to attempt to stop the noise, she thought ; what could she do ? She seemed to pay no attention either to little Fanny, who stood close by her side, saying every now and then, in a whining tone, “ Please, mother, a bit of bread ; bit of bread, please.”

The whining voice had been going on thus for a long time. Perhaps the mother scarcely heard ; at all events she took no notice. At last she got up. “ Bread, child,” she said. “ Why, you’re always wanting something ; I’m sure I don’t know where the food is to come from to keep ye all alive.”

'She handed down a tray, on which were some old crusts, which she kept on a shelf overhead. This proceeding was soon noticed. The kid was forsaken, the old concertina was put down, and a group of expectant faces with bright eyes gleaming under their shaggy, uncombed hair, surrounded Betsy in a moment. "Bit of bread, please," said one. "Bread and butter, please," said another. "Treacle, mother; treacle, please; oh do!" said a third.

Betsy went to the cupboard and brought out a large jar, into which she put a knife, and proceeded to cover the crusts with a good thick layer of treacle. How the little faces brightened when they saw the treacle! There was silence in the cottage after that, for the children's mouths were full. Their faces were soon besmeared with the treacle,

which made them look more dirty than ever.

“Mother! Dick has licked all the treacle off his bread.”

“Hold your tongue; I han’t then,” was the answer of the accused Dick.

“Mother! Tom’s a giving his’n to the kid,” said another little voice.

But Betsy took no notice. Presently, however, there was a loud fit of crying. Jim had dropped his bread, which was lying treacle downwards on the floor before him. George came to the rescue. The bread was picked up; the treacle carefully scraped up with George’s fingers, and restored to the bread. Jim’s eyes were wiped. George licked the floor to get something for his trouble, and all was peace again.

Mary Pascoe was the eldest of the family.

She was just fifteen years old—old enough to help her mother in many ways. It was her business to “mind baby.” It had been her business to do this as long as she could remember. Each successive baby as it came into the world was minded by Mary. She knew which of her little brothers and sisters had been cross babies, and given her much trouble ; and she knew which of them had gone off to sleep in the cradle “as soon as it was laid down a'most.” She found they often changed their characters afterwards. Quiet babies would turn out so troublesome and naughty as soon as they could speak ; and crying babies would become docile little ones afterwards. Mary used to think about this, and wonder what sort of a baby she had been, and whether she had given her mother much trouble.

Minding babies interfered sadly with school. Mary could not read, or not more than very little words. She was so big now, that she was very much ashamed of this, and extremely anxious to learn. Every now and then there had been some talk about sending her to school. "She shall go after Lady-day," Betsy would say; but when Lady-day came she found she could not part with her child, she was so useful at home. So Mary was fast growing into a big strong woman, and withal a dunce. But it was not her own fault. She had been sent with tolerable regularity to the Sunday School at St. Sidwell. And she had been diligent there, and had made the most of the instruction she got from Miss Dickson.

Indeed Mary was very different from the rest of her brothers and sisters. She had

always been quiet and industrious in her ways. Her dress too was neat and tidy. "Wherever does she get it from?" her neighbours used to say; "it's strange to see her looking so nice among all those dirty little things; there must be some good in her, or she would not look like that."

"Mary," said her mother, when the children had gone out of doors to finish their bread and treacle, "I'm going to market to-morrow; there's some things I must get for myself and you too, and father wants a handkerchief for his neck; it will take me a good long time; I shall be away the whole day pretty near, but you can take care of the little ones, can't you?"

"Yes, I suppose, mother; shall you be back before father comes home?"

"Oh yes, I'll try to; but you must boil

the potatoes, and get everything ready for supper. I don't see that the children can come to any mischief, and they mind you just about as much as they do me."

"George and Dick are the hardest to manage," said Mary, "they have such spirits, there's no keeping them quiet."

"Ay, they're proper spirited chaps, sure enough; you must keep your eye on them for fear they should come to mischief; they don't mean any harm, but they give a lot of trouble; I wish they were big enough to go out and work. Father talks of taking one of them out with him, come Midsummer."

"It would be easier to manage the rest then," said Mary, as she went out to bring in the clothes which were hanging out to dry on a line opposite the window.

They were torn, shabby clothes, and

added much to the general appearance of misery and poverty, as they swung backwards and forwards in the wind. Poor Mary sighed, as she put them into the basket. "I wish I could do something to make things more comfortable for mother," thought she; "but what can a poor girl like me do?"



CHAPTER II.

DEATH.

NEXT day Mary had to take care of the little flock in her mother's absence. Three were sent to school; but George could not go, because, as Dick afterwards explained to the master, "he ain't got no shoes." It was very unfortunate for Mary that George had no shoes, for if she could have got rid of him, she could have managed to keep the others in pretty good order.

As it was she succeeded better than she expected, till the three returned from school. Then her authority was quite overwhelmed

by numbers. Jim upset a tub of water on a form, and had to go to bed while his clothes were being dried. But of course he would not stay there, but was constantly dancing about the kitchen in his little night dress. Then the kid was brought in again, and the concertina was made as noisy as possible; while every now and then there was a demand for bread and treacle, and threats that if "Molly wouldn't give it, they'd take it."

In the midst of all this confusion Miss Dickson appeared at the door. Miss Dickson was the clergyman's daughter, and Mary's teacher in the Sunday School. She was very fond of Mary, and Mary was very fond of her in return. The children scuttled away in great confusion when they saw Miss Dickson coming. Jim was in bed in a moment

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with one eye peering over, for his little bed was in the corner of the room.

“Well, Mary,” said Miss Dickson, laughing, “you must find it hard work to keep them all in order. Where is your mother to-day?”

“Gone to market, please ma’am.”

“Oh, that’s it; so the little ones think they can make more noise than ever, I suppose. Shall I help you, Mary? I am not in any great hurry, and I think I might be able to keep them quiet for a while.”

“If you please, ‘m,” said Mary, “but you’ll find them terrible rough; I don’t know how it is, they worry poor mother dreadful.”

“I daresay they do. Here, little man, I want you,” said Miss Dickson; and she succeeded in catching George, who was making a rush for the door.

The other children looked very serious when they saw George was actually made a prisoner. What was Miss Dickson going to do? going to beat him, perhaps, for she had a stick. Jim felt glad that he was in bed out of harm's way. But he soon changed his mind ; for Miss Dickson, instead of using her stick, brought out a book full of pictures, which she was taking to poor Bessie Darton, she said, the girl with the broken arm, but she would shew it to the little Pascoes first.

Miss Dickson soon had a group round her. She told them she would shew them the pictures, if they were quiet, and listened to what she had to tell them. Then she gave Jim a ball to play with as well as he could in bed, and opened her book to shew the pictures to the others. There was some story or another connected with almost every

picture. The children listened to Miss Dickson, as she told the stories, with the greatest possible interest. You might have heard a pin drop, where but a few minutes ago there was so much noise and confusion. It seemed like magic.

“Oh,” thought Mary to herself, “if I was only a scholar like Miss Dickson, I could keep the little ones quiet sometimes too. I know the way now; I’ll see if I can’t remember some of the stories to tell them another day.”

At last Miss Dickson said it was time for her to go away. “Mother will be back soon,” she said, “and I hope you will do whatever she tells you; so Good evening all of you.”

“Please’m will you come again, and bring the pictures?” said a chorus of little voices.

“ Well, perhaps I may, she said ; “ but it all depends upon whether I hear a good account of you from Mary or not.”

Before the children had done talking of the wonderful things Miss Dickson had shewn them, and the pretty stories she had told them, their mother came back.

It was a wet night, and Betsy was wet through and through with the rain. It was a long walk too from the market town, and she had carried a heavy basket.

“ Oh dear, I feel dreadful bad to be sure, 'tis over-much fatigue,” she said, as she sank down on a chair almost fainting ; “ Mary, you must get father's supper, and see the children to bed, and I'll go upstairs at once, for I'm that tired I can't stay up any longer.”

So Betsy went to bed ; and from that bed

she never rose up again. The worry of life, with all its trials and cares and harassing anxieties, was nearly over for her. But Betsy had lived for this world, and now the next was very near.

Next morning she was very ill, and in the evening her husband went for the doctor, who told them Betsy had a fever. A few days afterwards another baby was born ; it only lived a few hours, and it was but too probable that Betsy would not live much longer. She rallied, however, and seemed to get better for a time.

Mr. Dickson, the clergyman, came constantly. He did all he could to awaken the poor sick woman to the change she was in. He spoke to her of the love of Jesus ; he told her that if she would repent, even then upon her sick bed, there was pardon through

the precious Blood of Christ for all her negligence and all her sins. But poor Betsy would say, "Too late! too late! I keep on thinking of my poor children, and what's to become of them; I can't think about myself at all."

But at other times she would express contrition, and the clergyman hoped that she felt more than she seemed to feel. "Pray for me, Sir," she would say; "pray for me; I've lived for this world, I've tried to do my duty by my family; and oh, it's hard to leave them all—very hard."

"God will provide for them, Betsy, never fear," said Mr. Dickson; "you must put your trust in Him. But think of your own soul; you have lived for this world, as you say yourself; try now, before it is too late, to prepare for another. Strive to fix your

thoughts on Christ hanging on the Cross for you ; and pray for grace that your heart may be changed, and that you may yet find mercy and peace through your Saviour."

Betsy's dangerous illness had the effect of keeping her husband away from the public-house. He used to sit by her bedside for hours, and his anguish at the thought of losing his wife was truly terrible to witness.

"Don't grieve so, darling," said Betsy, one day, "you will get on better without me, when I am gone ; but, Bill, promise me now—it is almost the last thing I shall be able to say—promise me that you will try your best to give up drink."

Bill was sobbing out loud. "I will, I will," he said, as he took her poor wasted hand in his. "Yes, Betsy, I will indeed ;

I'd give anything now that I had done so sooner, but oh ! I didn't think it would come to this."

"Hush ! hush ! Bill, it's the Lord's will, and He knows what is best, as the Parson says ; it's hard to die, and I'm not prepared ; oh ! that God would give me a little longer time to repent."

"You shan't die, Betsy, you shan't," said her husband, in an agony of desperation ; "the doctor can save you yet ; it's all my fault, I know it is," he continued, between his sobs ; "I've killed her ; God forgive me ; it's more than I can bear to think of."

"There's the poor children," said Betsy, again, in a voice which was only a faint whisper, "Mary will have to look after them now ; but she's a good child, and if you don't put any obstacle in the way by

drink, she'll get them all on very well. Poor motherless little ones! Take care of them, Bill, and help Mary, for she'll have work enough to look after them all."

"Come, come, wife," said her husband, rising up from the bed, "you mustn't talk like this here; we'll have you about again, looking after your own children yourself. Why not?"

"No, Bill," replied the faint whisper again, "it's no use talking like that. I should like to live, but the Lord is taking me away; I feel I am going; I hope Mr. Dickson will be here soon, for I should like to see him once more while I can make myself understood."

Mr. Dickson did come; and he said afterwards, that it was the greatest comfort to him to look back at that last interview,

for he never saw Betsy alive again. A week afterwards her coffin was carried along the narrow winding lane to the churchyard. It was a warm Spring day. The birds sang sweetly, and the hedges were bright with primroses and violets ; but poor Bill Pascoe was utterly broken down with grief, as he walked behind the remains of his wife. He accused himself bitterly of having neglected her. He thought in the sight of God he was a murderer ; and he trembled as he went into the Church, which he had not entered before for so many, many years. He trembled at the words of the solemn service. He thought the eye of God was upon him, as indeed it was, and always had been ; but poor Bill had not thought about it before, and now he would have given anything to escape, as it were, from the sight of that God.

Some of his friends tried to cheer him up, and said the commonplace things: "We must all go one day, Bill,"—or, "She's gone to a better place." But these things brought no comfort to the unhappy man; he had neglected his wife; he hadn't given her enough food, nor warm-enough clothes, he thought, and he had gone on and on, and now at last she was dead, and it was his fault. He cursed drink, he cursed the public-house, he swore at his companions without any sense or meaning to his oaths. Then suddenly remembering the last words of his wife on her death-bed, he threw himself down, and tore his hair, and almost raved in his despair. "I'll give up drink, anyway," he said to himself. "Yes, if it costs me my life, I'll give it up; and then the little ones, at all events, shall have food

and clothes enough. But what is to become of me without my wife?"

And Mary—what was she doing? Her father scarcely took any notice of her in the first days of his bereavement. But Miss Dickson had seen her, and had encouraged her. The full responsibility of managing the children, and providing food for them and her father, had not come upon her yet. Aunt Jane, her father's sister, was there, but she was not to remain more than a fortnight more; and then Mary would have it all on her own hands. She was a simple-hearted, quiet girl. Gentle in her manner towards the little ones, and yet determined that she would do her duty by them, and try to make them good and obedient. From the first, when it was but too evident that Betsy was dying, Miss Dickson had taught

Mary a short prayer, in which she was to ask for God's help to direct her right, and for wisdom to manage the little ones, and to provide all that was necessary for the family. And she said the prayer regularly, and from her heart, and felt a child-like trust and confidence in the great God to whom she prayed, that He would indeed support her in whatever she might have to do.

So while her father was giving way to despair, Mary was on her knees, where no one could see her, praying that she might be strengthened for the work which she was so suddenly called upon to undertake.



CHAPTER III.

THE YOUNG HOUSEKEEPER.

“ WHERE’s mother ? I want mother,” said Jim’s little whining voice one day ; “ why did they put her in a box, and carry her away ? When will she be back again, Molly ? I want her.”

“ Mother will never come back to you, dear,” said Mary, gently, though she could hardly keep from crying at the childish prattle of her little brother. “ Mother will never, never, never come back ; but some day Jim will go to her, and see her again, if he is a good little boy, and does what he’s told.”

Jim's mouth looked very much as if he was going to cry at this. "But why did she go away? I want her, take me to her now, Molly, do—me kiss you, if you will," he said, in a little coaxing way he had.

Mary kissed the tears away, and said, "Mother is very happy now, happier than she ever was before, so we must not wish to have her back again; but we must try to be good, that we may go some time or other where she is now, and see her again; but I'll tell you a story, Jim, if you will sit and listen to it."

"Oh, yes, I'll listen," and the little face brightened up again in a moment; is it one of Miss Dickson's stories?"

"Yes, it's one of Miss Dickson's stories, and it's about a little boy; I heard her tell it at the Sunday School."

So Mary told Jim the story, and he forgot all about his trouble very shortly.

Betsy Pascoe had been dead now nearly two months, and some changes had taken place in the family party. When Aunt Jane left she had taken the baby away with her ; it was about a year old, and Aunt Jane thought she would bring it up as her own, and the child's father was very glad to have it so well taken care of. Then it had been settled that George could not go to school any longer, but that he must go out to help his father at his work. Bill Pascoe was a thatcher, and he said he could make George very useful in helping him, though he was so young, and then Mary would have one less to look after. But as it was she would have enough to do. There were three children to send off to school every morn-

ing, and two that remained all day at home
Jim and Betsy.

The first thing Mary was anxious to do was to make all her little brothers and sisters look tidy and neat. Since his wife's death, Bill Pascoe had not once been to the public-house, and he told Mary that if she could continue to get or make better clothes for the children, he would pay five shillings a-week towards doing it.

Poor Mary did not know anything about cutting out, nor indeed any needlework but the plainest stitching, for want of the teaching she ought to have had years before. But she told Miss Dickson what her father said, and asked her what it was best to do. Miss Dickson said she would shew her how to cut out, and help her over all the difficult parts; but that the first thing to be done

was to set to work and mend the holes in father's coat and trousers, and Mary herself could do that. After a while things began to look better. Pascoe himself looked like a respectable well-to-do workman, and the children had decent clothes with no holes in them. But to do this Mary had worked day and night ; she had to sit up often to mend Dick's trousers or Tommy's pinafore. Then she must be up early to get breakfast for the children, and sometimes for father and George when they were working near home. Miss Dickson encouraged her, and Mary persevered at her work steadily, and was greatly pleased to see things improving.

“I wish mother could see us now,” she said to herself, “she'd scarce know father and the children ; if father had only given her his wages long ago, what a difference it

would have been ! for mother knew how to work, and I don't; she'd have made us all look nice in half the time that I have."

Mary was most anxious about Sundays. It was a very common practice among the neighbours to bake on Sunday morning, and to prepare on that day the dinners for a great part of the week, Mary was determined not to do so. She was obliged to give up going to the Sunday School in the morning, because she had so much housework to do, and the other children to get ready. But she asked her father to do without a hot dinner, so that she might go to Church in the morning, and he said that he would. Then she asked if he would go to Church too. She did this timidly, for she was not quite sure whether it was right to ask her father such a question. He only shrugged

his shoulders, and turned away without saying anything.

Mary contrived generally to go to the Sunday School in the afternoon, and to the service afterwards, when she was not obliged to stay at home with Betsy and Jim. So that Sunday would have been a very happy day of rest for her, and a time of real enjoyment at church and school, were it not for the one great drawback that her father was spending the holy day in idleness. Bill Pascoe staid in bed Sunday morning till nearly twelve o'clock; then he would get up, have his dinner, and go off to pay a visit to some of his fellow-workmen. When he came back from his walk he had supper, and went to bed immediately afterwards. So Sunday was spent in eating, sleeping, and idle talk.

Miss Dickson made herself so completely Mary's friend, that Mary felt she could tell her all her little troubles, and ask for her counsel and advice.

"Please, 'm,'" Mary said to her one day, "I don't know what to do about father; he's been so good and kind to us ever since mother's death that we don't want for anything, but he never goes to Church or anywhere Sundays; it seems so sad to see him in his working clothes, but I suppose I can't do any good, can I mam?"

"Yes, Mary, I think you can, but not by attempting to set yourself up as a teacher, for I don't think that would be right; but there is one way, and that way the best of all which is open to you to use; can't you guess what it is?"

"I suppose you mean that I can pray,

Miss," said Mary; "and so I do, I pray night and morning that God would change father's heart, and show him how wrong it is to waste his Sundays so."

"And God will hear your prayer, Mary, and answer it in His own way and at His own time. You know the promise, 'Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you.' But we cannot expect the answer at once, nor perhaps in the way we should have thought most likely ourselves. We must patiently abide always, and pray more and more."

"I think sometimes, if I could only read a bit, Miss," said Mary, "that I could be of more use to father and the little ones; but I can scarcely spare any time now, though Fanny gives me a lesson of an evening now and then. It's quite beautiful to hear her

read, mam ; she's getting to be a fine scholar."

"I daresay she is, and she ought to be a great help to you in washing up the things, and keeping the house clean," said Miss Dickson ; "but I am afraid her teaching cannot be of much use. It has just struck me that, as you are so anxious to learn to read, I could help you, by giving you an hour or so twice a-week during the summer. I think we could manage to keep the little ones quiet, couldn't we ? And then I could give you the lesson in your own house, which would save time."

Mary scarcely knew how to thank Miss Dickson enough, she was so delighted with her kind proposal. She was sure that, with Miss Dickson's help, she could soon learn to read. So it was settled that she should

be ready in the afternoon two days every week for her reading lesson, and that Fanny was to help her in the evenings as much as possible.

Mary went about her house-work in a cheerful happy spirit. Her quiet determined way with the children gradually gave her a great influence over them. They seldom disobeyed her, for they knew that, if they did, they would be punished for it. And what they thought worse even than punishment, they knew that disobedience or bad behaviour vexed and grieved the sister who was so good and kind to them all. Their high spirits would make them mischievous sometimes, but a word from Mary was generally enough to stop it.

She taught Fanny how to wipe down the tables and forms and chairs, and to scrub

out the kitchen. Between them both everything was kept as clean as a new pin, and the candlesticks and other things on the chimney-piece as bright as ever they could be made. Bill Pascoe himself was never tired of praising his Mary, who had made such a wonderful change in his house and in everything at home. "Everything is comfortable like now," he said, "and it used to be so different; I can sit and smoke my pipe at home just as pleasant as if I was in the 'public!'" And then he would add to himself, "It would all have been like this here long ago, if I had not been a brute and killed my poor wife; but I'll keep my word to her anyway, and keep the children decent and respectable, as they are now. I used to be ashamed of my young ones, now I'm proud on 'em."

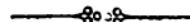
“ How do you manage to keep them all so nice ? ” he said, one day to Mary.

“ I don’t know, father,” she replied, “ God helps me, and Miss Dickson has taught me a deal.”

“ God helps you ! child ; I reckon you help yourself. But that Miss Dickson, now, she must be a kind lady ; she teaches you, don’t she ? Poor child, you haven’t a had the schooling you ought.”

“ Yes, she teaches me, father ; shall I try to read a bit to show how I’m getting on ? ”

“ Yes, if you like,” replied her father. So Mary took down a Testament, and read a few verses to him, with a secret prayer that what she read might be of use.



CHAPTER IV.

MARY'S AFTER LIFE.

FOUR years had passed away. Mary was now a young woman, nineteen years old. She was still keeping her father's house, but there was not so much work to do as there had been, for the family was reduced in number. Fanny had been out in a place, as nursery maid, six months, and was doing well there. Dick, as well as George, were both in farm places, so there were only three left—Tom, Jim, and Bessy.

Bill Pascoe still never went to Church; but he had said one day that he thought it was not respectable to go about on Sundays

without better clothes, so he had bought a Sunday suit, which he now always wore on that day. This was something, Mary thought. At all events it marked the day, and she hoped that by and by something more might come of it. Mary herself had learned to read tolerably well, for Miss Dickson had taken much trouble to teach her, and Mary was anxious to make the most of her instruction. She often read out loud to her father in the long winter evenings, while he sat by the fire and smoked his pipe. Miss Dickson supplied her with books from the "Parish Lending Library," so she was never at a loss for something easy and amusing which they could all understand.

The cottage in which the Pascoes lived was about a mile from the Church on the border of Darston Moor. It was the last of

a row of three cottages, and both the others were occupied by labourers with their wives and families. Sally Parker, who lived in the house at the other end of the row, was notorious for her bad temper and her ill-natured gossip. During Betsy Pascoe's life she was constantly quarrelling with her; and after her death she was jealous of Mary, because "the Parson's young lady came to visit her so often," and she tried to find something against her in every possible way.

One day Sally went to visit her neighbour, Betty Green, and she could not conceal a look of triumph, as she said, "Have you heard, Betty, what they say about Mary Pascoe?"

"No, I hav'nt," replied Betty, "I hope it ain't no harm, for Mary is a good girl,

and does her best. It's something extraordinary to see what she has done in that family ; they used to be all proper wild rough chaps, them Pascoe boys, and see now how well they've turned out ; and it's all Mary, so it is."

" Yes, that's very true, I know all that ; but Mary's a bit stuck up, I say, and I don't see why she should be. What is she better than my Jane, that she should hold her head so high, and have the Parson and Miss Dickson always helping her to do this and that ? We don't grudge her that kind of thing, though, for, thank goodness, we can get on well enough without any help from the Parson's people. But I know one thing, Betty, Mr. Dickson wouldn't do so much for Mary, if he knew all that the folks say."

" And what have they to say against

Mary Pascoe?" asked Betty, looking up with some anxiety in her kind face.

"Why, they say she's no better than she should be! and that she has a young man, just like all the rest of them."

"Oh, oh," said Betty, and the look of anxiety passed away at once, "that's all, is it? All the harm of that is in the way folks with ill-natured tongues like to put it. Hadn't you and I young men, Sally? He's a wise man, whoever he is, that has chosen Mary for his wife; and I'll be bound that he's a respectable man, or Mary wouldn't have anything to say to him."

"Well, they say he's pretty well for that now, but he was a wild one once. It's Tom Barnes, the carpenter, him that lives up to Buxton Cross."

"Ay, to be sure," replied Betty, "Tom

Barnes. Well, Mary might do better, and she might do worse. But she won't have anything to do with him, I'm quite sure, unless he's as steady as a rock. She's seen too much of the misery her poor mother used to be in to bring it on herself."

"Well, I know nothing about that, the world don't give him the best of characters ; but, any way, they say that Tom's about with Mary at all hours, and there's a pretty deal said about it—that don't do Mary much credit. They say she's no better than others, though she does pretend to be such a saint, and goes so regular to Church." Then Sally Parker went away to tell her story in some other cottage, where she hoped it would have more effect than it had on Betty Green.

And what was the truth with regard to

this story, by which an ill-natured tongue was trying to injure the fair fame and the happiness of Mary Pascoe ? It was this :

On her way to Church, Mary had to pass by the end of the lane which led up to the cottage in which Tom Barnes lived. One Sunday morning, just as she came up to this lane, Tom was coming down towards her, and, with the usual greeting, they walked on together. Mary thought nothing of it. It was an accidental meeting, such as happened every day, and she never gave it a second thought. But the following Sunday the same thing happened ; and Sunday after Sunday, just as Mary came to the end of the lane, somehow or other it always happened that Tom Barnes had just come to the same spot. At first, Mary thought it was only an odd accident ; but by degrees,

as the same odd accident was so often repeated, she began to understand the truth, though Tom used to come up, pretending that it was the strangest thing in the world.

As soon as Mary understood what Tom meant by meeting her so often, she tried to avoid him by going to Church another way. But then he overtook her on her return, and walked all the way home with her. When Bill Pascoe saw Tom at the door, he asked him to come in, for he was only too glad to have some company on Sundays ; and Tom, nothing loath, went in and staid, and walked with Mary to Church in the afternoon. After that, Tom used to come up every now and then, to "sit with Pascoe," he said, but in reality to see Mary. Her father soon saw what Tom came for, and was only too glad to encourage the young carpenter's visits.

you would let me call you my own, own Mary."

The tears were falling fast now from Mary's face which was still turned away. With an effort she pulled away her hand and said, "No, Tom, it can't be; it can't be."

"But why not?" said poor Tom, getting more urgent, as he felt his case was desperate. "Is it that you cannot love me; or is it that I am too late, and you love another?"

"No, it's not that; I shall always think of you, Tom, as my very best friend, but—"

"Give me some hope," said Tom, again. "I will go away now, but say that I may try again. Oh, Mary, don't make me despair."

But Mary only shook her head, and breaking away from him, walked as fast as

she could towards her own house. She threw herself on her knees upstairs alone in the bedroom, and thanked God that He had given her strength to do that which she thought to be right. And she prayed for Tom that he might be made by the grace of God a true servant of Christ, and meet for the inheritance of the Saints in Light.

As for Tom, he turned away, and said to himself, "What a fool I was ; I might have known I was not good enough for the like of her. She's as pure and good as the holy angels, and, of course, she would'nt have me. But I thought, too, that she would'nt despise me quite so much. I think I'll try once more. But now, there is nothing for it but to go away."

A few weeks afterwards, Bill Pascoe said to his daughter : "Why, Mary, what has

become of young Barnes ? he used to come here now and again, but we hav'nt seen him this long time."

Mary could only say she didn't know, though she had heard some report of Tom's going away.

Barnes got work in a town about twenty miles from St. Sidwells. Before he went, he bid Mary, Good-bye, and told her that he hoped to return again some future day. Then he gently pressed her hand, and went away.

"Mary," said her father next Sunday morning, "I'll go to Church with you this morning, and hear what the Parson has to say ; it can't do me any harm, you know, and I suppose you'd say it would do me good. So get out my hat, and bring the children, and come along."

“Oh! father, I am so glad ; nothing hardly could give me more pleasure.”

So Bill Pascoe went to church, and he said, coming home, that he liked the singing, and he liked the sermon, but he didn’t know much about the rest. But he would go again and try if he should like it better a second time.

After that, Pascoe went regularly to church, and he seemed to pay great attention to what he heard.

The next news that Mary heard about Tom Barnes was that he was very ill, and there were but small hopes of his recovery. He had been away now more than six months, and along with the sad news of his illness, there came too the report that he had been very successful in his trade, and that he had been getting on remarkably well as a steady and skilful workman.

Mary's anxiety was extreme. She made Jim call at the house of Tom's parents and enquire every now and then how he was getting on. At last there came tidings of recovery, and that he would be sent back to St. Sidwells for change of air, as soon as he was fit to be moved.

It was Easter Day. A bright, sunny Easter Day. The spring flowers looked as if they were rejoicing in the warmth of the Spring sunshine. Mary, too, was happy, more happy than she could say, for her father was going to attend the Lord's Supper for the first time that day. It was no new and sudden decision on his part, but his mind had been gradually awakened to seek the "truth as it is in Jesus," and with the earnest counsel and advice of Mr. Dickson, he had been for many weeks preparing to *come to the Lord's table.*

It was the quiet and good example of his dear child, he said, that had first drawn him, almost insensibly to himself, to see what there could be in that religion which made her so kind and gentle and loving to every one, and which had brought such happy sunshine to his wretched home. God had touched his heart, and he hoped now that by God's grace he would be able to persevere to the end.

Mary did not know till the service was over who the pale and thin man was who had also on that happy Easter Day come to the Supper of the Lord. But outside when Tom came up to shake hands with her and their eyes met each other, Tom thought he read in the look of happiness which he saw in Mary's face that he should not be refused a second time.

Mary felt that Tom was no hypocrite, and that he would not have come to the Lord's Supper unless he had sought for pardon and peace through the precious blood of Christ.

* * * * *

As soon as Tom Barnes could get a comfortable cottage, he and Mary Pascoe were married. Fanny came back from service, and took Mary's place in attending to her father and the three children.



Loudon :
WILLIAM MACINTOSH,
24, Paternoster Row. E.C.







